

Widowed Catholics find friends in NAIM

By C.L. Rugestein
staff writer

All of a sudden you're alone. There's no one to do things with — going to dinner, to the movies, for walks, or to just talk to. The life built around a deceased spouse is gone and, along with it, the comforting companionship of everyday life.

Such has been the experience of Bernice Barduca, and many other widows and widowers who belong to group called NAIM.

NAIM is a special outreach of the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit and serves as a support group to surviving spouses. NAIM seeks to fill the need for companionship.

"You don't even need to go out for coffee," Barduca, a member of the Rochester NAIM chapter, said. "With NAIM, you can get out your list and call someone to just talk."

THE GROUP, started about 25

years ago in downtown Detroit by Monsignor Clifford Sawyer, has grown to six chapters throughout the metropolitan Detroit metropolitan area.

Sawyer named it for a city in a familiar Gospel story, said the archdiocese's Family Life director, Bud Ozar. At the city of Naim, Jesus stopped a funeral procession and raised the only son of a widow from the dead.

"It's an extension of the compassion Jesus extended in the Gospel, and we're extending that today through NAIM," Ozar said.

"The basic thrust of the group is friendship and companionship through social, educational and spiritual activities."

THE ACTIVITIES are many. "It's incredible," said Ozar with a laugh. "A good part of their monthly meeting is just getting their calendar straight."

A member of one chapter is en-

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ted to participate in the activities of the others. Some of the more recent activities have been a day at the Hazel Park Race track, trips to Holland, Greek Town and Frankenmuth, movie nights, and an "everybody's" birthday party — one card serves all, Ozar said.

The groups' primary purpose is to build friendships to help members get through the hard times.

They meet in churches or church-related buildings like Knights of Columbus halls or American Legion halls. Members find NAIM a lot of times, but many referrals come from the local parishes.

"We're very dependent on them to

make contact, to talk with the surviving spouse within three to four months (after the funeral)," Ozar said.

There are a couple of groups for younger widows, but average ages range from 40-45 and 60-65.

WHILE MANY groups for the widowed (and divorced) have reputations as "meat markets" — places to meet a new partner — Bernice Barduca was pleased to find NAIM was not.

"The atmosphere was more relaxed," she said about her first meeting. "People are so much more friendly and open. That's what I was

looking for — somebody to do things with."

Barduca had married at 16, had her three children by 24, and was widowed at 51. Never having worked outside the home, she had built her life around her husband and family.

She got involved with the Rochester NAIM group and has served in several capacities, including activities chairman for two years. And she found a new friend whom she travels with.

"She was born in Wales and I was born in the Upper Peninsula, and we were amazed at the similarities of our experiences," she said. They're so amazed that they're planning a harvest festival dinner for the Rochester chapter like the festivals

they remember from their home towns.

"You never get over the every day loneliness" of the loss of a spouse, Barduca said. But with friends to share it, it does get easier.

NAIM's chapters are Wayne, Macomb, Rochester, Oakland, Belle River and Downriver. They're planning a special Day of Reflection in Windsor on Nov. 12 at the Pope John XXIII Center, with a trip to a local restaurant afterwards.

"It'll be an opportunity to look at the losses they have in common," said Ozar.

For more information about NAIM, contact Rev. Syl Taube at the Family Life Office of the Archdiocese of Detroit, 237-5892.

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